ORIGINS
OF
CHRISTIANITY

Volume Three

EVOLUTION
OF
CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY

DIMENSIONAL ARTS

DIMENSIONS, founded in 1953, is non-sectarian and non-political, and is produced by an unsalaried staff on a non-profit basis.

Its purpose is to search out and share those fundamental principles underlying ancient and modern experience and thought which provide the basis for man's evolutionary progress—principles which can help him in a practical way fulfill his responsibilities to himself and his fellow men.

Editor: CLARENCE KLUG

Subscriptions, manuscripts and all correspondence should be sent to:
DIMENSIONAL ARTS, P.O. BOX 346, OJAI, CALIFORNIA

The title "Dimensions" is registered in the U.S. Patent Office.
Published at The Retreat, Ojai, California.

Dimensional Arts
P.O. Box 346
OJAI, CALIFORNIA

So understand the Light, He answered, and make friends with it.

HERMES THE THRICE-GREATEST.

INTRODUCTION.

FOR several years now a corps of scholars has been sorting and piecing together with utmost care and infinite patience the hundreds of thousands of fragments which comprise the Dead Sea Scrolls. They will continue to do so for decades to come; and when the work is completed we will have some of the writings of a minor sect. This, most scholars agree, could have been none other than the Essenes who stemmed from the main body of Judaism several centuries before the beginning of the Christian Era, and whose hidden documents escaped destruction during a transitional period of history when book-burning was the order of the day. Had the early Church Fathers extended their search for contraband gospels to caves, there probably would be less ecclesiastical head-scratching now.

According to Philo of Alexandria, the Essenes numbered more than four thousand souls. They suddenly disappeared from the scene of history at just about the time that the members of another (?) sect, with very similar customs and characteristics and originating in the same locale, were *first* called Christians at Antioch (*Acts* xi, 26), some years *after* the death of Jesus! Philo, writing around 20 A.D., Pliny the Elder about 70 A.D., and Josephus, the Jewish historian who goes to considerable length to describe their mode of living and customs, all mention the Essenes. Yet each of them is strangely silent about the Christians, with the exception of a few, brief lines found in Josephus which trustworthy scholars have long since identified as a forgery by Eusebius, the ecclesiastical Baron Munchausen of his day, whom Burckhardt, the eminent Swiss historian, calls "the first thoroughly dishonest historian of antiquity." Considering the lack of factual historic verification of the gospel story, it is little wonder that the intense curiosity of scholars, antiquarians, and the public in general has been so aroused by anything that might tend to throw light on one of the greatest enigmas of history.

These particular scrolls, the gospels of the Essenes, will in turn

be but a mere fragment of the once voluminous records of earlier civilizations that anciently existed, many of which we might even now possess, but for the violent and senseless destruction that accompanied the passing of one age and the birth of another. Had the original and nobler aspects of what today is called Christianity been permitted to blend naturally with the learning and culture of so-called 'paganism,' from which they were derived, some of the darkest pages of our religious history need never have been written. Western civilization would have been richer in wisdom and, more important, we would have understood instead of ignored the basic principles underlying other religions. Surely, 'paganism' was not all evil, as ecclesiastics have tried to lead us to believe, a fact evidenced by the Renaissance, for the Revival of Learning was made possible chiefly through the rediscovery of the ancient classics which gave the Western world its first breath of clean intellectual air after living in a smog of bigotry for a thousand years.

No sooner had the Church become a powerful, far-flung politico-religious organization after the days of Constantine, than the wanton destruction of everything that was fine in ancient culture began with a vengeance. It was marked by a fanaticism of which there are few parallels in history, and probably was the greatest book-destroying project of all time. How many thousands of Greek and Latin manuscripts on science, philosophy, religion, history and kindred subjects were consigned to the flames cannot be known. In Alexandria, the foremost seat of learning of the ancient world, the Library alone, which was burned in A.D. 389 by a Christian mob instigated by Bishop Theophilos, is said to have contained some 700,000 items. Anything that disagreed with Christian theology, whether of a religious, philosophical or historical nature, was destroyed without a shadow of compunction, a work of annihilation that went on for hundreds of years until complete conformity and intellectual paralysis held Europe in their lethal grasp from the Baltic to the Mediterranean. There were, of course, a few truly noble souls who kept the light burning through those centuries of darkness, whose consecration transcended the bounds of their creed, but for the most part, the smudge-pots of superstition gave off far more soot and smoke than light. Blind faith and sanctimonious piety were blessed and exalted while intelligence and investigation were damned.

Why did the Church Fathers from the very beginning dedicate their energies with such ardor and passion to one of the greatest and most shameful brain-washings the world has known? They simply were trying to make good in the eyes of history that their religion was 'unique' – something 'new' which the world had never known before – a claim that invariably has been made by the proponents of every religion. Mere Faith, unless counterbalanced by Intelligence, can do strange things to people. So they proceeded to destroy every shred of evidence that might give a clue from where their doctrines had been derived. Such a thing as a 'new' religion simply does not exist and never has. All have borrowed from older sources, clothed the ancient gods in fresh nomenclature and raiment, and lo! a 'new' religion – and *the only true one* – is given unto mankind, so shamefully neglected by its Creator in all previous ages!

And who were the ancient gods? The unseen, impersonal, spiritual forces and elements of Nature – now anthropomorphized, that is, cast in the image of man! – that the untrained masses who were not intellectually or morally eligible for the discipline of the Mysteries might not be without some kind of spiritual guidance. All the exoteric religions of the world, whether of the East or the West, are but crumbs that have fallen from the table of the Ancient Wisdom. This sacred body of truths has been preserved by the Protectors of the race through every age while civilizations rose and fell, whether they were known to the public when times were propitious and minds receptive, or when, for the safeguarding of the ultimate heritage of mankind, their true status was concealed. One such notable instance was that of the Alchemists of the Middle Ages who posed as deluded half-wits to escape the persecution of the Church. Their true purpose was to transmute the baser elements of human nature into spiritual worth and value, to awaken the souls and minds of men – not to change lead into gold, which was used merely as a blind and a symbol. When the last of the Mystery Schools of a dying civilization were finally closed under Justinian in the sixth century A.D. (undoubtedly at the request of the hierophants themselves rather than by an edict of the Church as has been claimed), the teachings were hidden under strange metaphors and allegories so that those whose intuitions and powers of intellection were not drugged by medieval superstition and fear might find Light in an age of darkness.

That present day religion is a syncretistic adaptation of older concepts cannot be doubted by any fair-minded person who has looked beyond mere form and ceremony into the religious origins of more than his own faith. A small dissident sect of Judaism, in which Christianity most probably had its beginning after its contact with the Gentiles and Grecian thought, appropriated the rite of the savior-gods which had been enacted in the Mystery Schools of Greece and Asia Minor for centuries before the beginning of the Christian era. For its holy day, instead of the Sabbath of the Jews, it chose Sunday, the sacred day of Mithraism. That the early Christians, as did the Mithraists, Greeks, Persians, Egyptians and Hindus, associated their Soter or Savior with the Sun-God cannot be doubted in view of the evidence available. Even as late as the seventh century, one of the early Christian hymns still in use contains the following verse:

O Thou, Real Sun, infill us,
Shining with perpetual light!
Splendor of the holy Spirit
Pervade our minds!

This identical thought is found in the *"Gāyatrī"* or "Song," one of the hymns of the *Rig-Veda* of ancient India, which from time immemorial has been repeated by every generation of Hindus and is even today held in reverence. In the original Sanskrit it consists of ten words only, but so rich and compact is the language, that it requires several lines to convey the thought. One of the most beautiful paraphrases of this Gāyatrī is that of G. de Purucker:

O thou golden Sun of most excellent splendor, illumine our hearts and fill our minds so that we, recognizing our oneness with the Divinity which is the heart of the Universe, may see the pathway before our feet and tread it to those distant goals of perfection, stimulated by thine own radiant light.

This is far from being Sun-worship, as 'practical' and utilitarian minds have interpreted it. Rather is it a recognition of the Divine Essence that pervades the whole of existence, from sun to man; a reaching in aspiration toward the "Father in heaven" referred to by a Teacher of 'mysteries' nearly two thousand years ago, "the Light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world" of St. Paul.

In the symbolism of the archaic rites, familiar to the early Christians and from which they freely borrowed, it was the Christos spirit, crucified on the crôss of matter during its earthly pilgrimage among the 'living dead,' which must be resurrected from the body or 'tomb' of matter. Such was the original meaning of "initiation into the Greater Mysteries" when the neophyte, after long and arduous trials to test his moral and spiritual fiber, was brought to his 'second' or 'virgin' birth before undergoing the greatest experience known to man — self-conscious union with his own inner god. This was nothing that could be arbitrarily conferred by ritual and ceremony. When Nero, the Roman Emperor, applied for entrance into the Mysteries he was denied, and frankly told that he was not fit material for that sublime experience. Man is what he makes of himself, spiritually as well as materially.

In the Mysteries of Egypt, the successful candidates were known as "Sons of the Sun," in recognition of the analogical structure of the cosmos: "As it is above, so is it below." Plutarch, the Greek philosopher and biographer, tells in his essay "On Isis and Osiris" that over the portal of the Temple of Isis at Sais, Egypt, there was engraved this inscription:

Isis am I: all that has been, and is, and will be; and my garment hath no one of mortals ever raised.

To this Proclus, the Neo-Platonist, later added a significant conclusion:

And the fruit which I brought forth became the Sun.

Here we have Isis, the Cosmic 'Virgin-Mother' of Space, giving birth to the immaculately conceived God-child Horus, the Sun. And just as the Cosmic Divinity of the Sun, of which we see but the outer garments, is said to be immaculately conceived and brought forth, so in man is the Christos brought to birth when the ordinary human self has earned the right by 'becoming' one in essence with its divine parent.

Now these ideas were widely spread abroad in the world at the time of the formation of the Christian faith and its theological system, and the above is clearly but another example of how a highly philosophical and indeed beautiful teaching was appropriated, anthropomorphized and made into a Church dogma. It is recorded that at least two of the Church Fathers, Theodoret and Cyril of Jerusalem, attested to the fact that the Divine Sun was the source of the individual Christos in man, the latter being a ray of the Cosmic Christos.

And Pope Leo in the 5th century, in his Sermon on the Epiphany (No. LV) stated that the Manichaeans (Gnostic) placed the Christos of men in the luminous substance of the Invisible Sun. (Cf. ***The Esoteric Tradition*** by G. de Purucker.)

It is not surprising, then, that Christians have been discouraged from investigating other, and even their own religious concepts, and in some instances actually forbidden to do so. They are supposed blindly to accept and believe what they are told, as if intellectual honesty and listening to the voice of conscience were a crime in the eyes of God! A process which by its very nature defeats the purpose of true religion; but such is the secret weapon that *priestcraft* has used in every age to hold supremacy over the mind of man. Greek religion maintained no priestcraft and had no dogmas as understood today, its 'dogmas' – the word is Greek and meant simply 'opinion' – were as many as there were individuals willing to declare for or against any 'opinion.' And it is well known how vociferous in argument, particularly on philosophical questions, the Athenians were! All in all, the widest and freest possible discussion of all religious and philosophical problems was encouraged, thereby producing a culture and a civilization which have since been unequaled in the view of many scholars.

Today there are some 250 or more versions of Christianity, all going their separate ways, clinging tenaciously to *their* concept of the Master's teaching, as if their 'dogma' were the one and only truth. One could hardly expect them to do otherwise, when for centuries theologians have been dodging every type of unfettered inquiry lest they stumble over the cornerstone of their own doctrines. How so many supposed authoritative interpreters of religion could, for more than a millennium, fail to discern the esoteric or hidden meaning of the Christos legend, especially as the gospels report Jesus as teaching in two distinct manners, parables to the multitudes and 'mysteries' to the 'chosen few,' is beyond understanding. The tragedy is that one must turn to outside sources and the older religions to learn what the teachings of the Christian Master really were. Unless theologians remove their medieval blinders and take their intuitions out of moth balls; unless they discover anew the Light that was rekindled for mankind by the great Teacher whom they profess to follow; and, more than all else, unless they affirm the truth of the essential divinity of Man instead of insisting that human souls must be saved by some external agency, history will once more repeat itself. It is later than they think. If Nature abhors a vacuum, it is also true that she will not tolerate stagnation.

The Great Wheel of Life is ever turning and waits neither for man nor man-made religions. When the latter become hidebound and crystallized from hardening of the spiritual arteries, they drop by the wayside and are quietly laid to rest with their ancient ancestors in the graveyard of man-corrupted religions, to become only a name in history and unmourned, while the flowing current of Truth seeks outlet elsewhere.

Dimensions

Clarence A. Burg

Editor

JEWRY.

The Influence of Babylon.

THE third stream which poured into the matrix of the Christian origins. was that of Jewry. Even before the Exile the undisciplined tribes composing this peculiar nation had had their "Schools of the Prophets," small communities holding themselves apart and recruited by seers and visionaries. Up to this time the traditions of the Jews and their

conceptions of religion had been mostly of a very crude nature compared to those of the more highly civilized nations which surrounded them, although of course they were distinguished by the particularism of a nascent exclusive monotheism and a growing detestation of idolatry.

In Babylon, however, they came into intimate contact with a great and very ancient civilization, and the impression it made upon them can be clearly traced in the history of their subsequent religious development.

Most of the nation remained contentedly in Babylon, while the leaders of those who returned set to work to rewrite their old traditions and reformulate their religious conceptions, by the light of the wider views they had absorbed—all of which is to be clearly traced in the various stages of evolution of their national scripture, the various deposits of which are revealed to us by the patient researches of scientific Biblical scholars and the ever new discoveries of archæology.

The Jewish writers appropriated to themselves the traditions of the great Semitic race and of the nations of Chaldæa and of Babylon, and used them for the glorification of their own origins and history, in the strange conviction that they all applied to them as the "chosen people" of God. The elaborate doctrine of purity on which the Persian Zoroastrian tradition laid such stress was eagerly adopted by their priesthood, and we perceive in their library of religious books the gradual elimination of the cruder ideas of Deity and the gradual development of far

higher conceptions in (at times) most wonderful poetic outbursts.

The Writing of Scripture History.

It must not be supposed, however, that the re-writers and editors of the old traditions were forgers and falsifiers in any ordinary sense of the word. Antiquity in general had no conception of literary morality in its modern meaning, and all writing of a religious character was the outcome of an inner impulse. The wealth of technical terms bestowed on these ancient writers and their methods by modern Biblical critics forces the student almost unconsciously to read into those times ideas and standards that had then no existence. Again, a common fault is to endow these ancient worthies of the Jews with motives of action and refinements of belief which only belong to the best in Christendom; and so we not only do grave injustice to their memories, but we read into their history an atmosphere of too great refinement for the actual Jew of the period to have lived in. It should also be remembered that the mythologizing of history and the historicizing of mythology were not peculiar to the Jews, but common to the times; what was peculiar to them was their fanatical belief in Divine favouritism and their egregious claim to the monopoly of God's providence.

The Mythology of History.

Now the Jews, as all children of the desert, had ingrained in them an invincible longing for freedom, and at the same time they had the innate poetic imagination of all those who live in close contact with nature.

The two "kingdoms" that were always fighting

among themselves and with their neighbours, "Israel" and "Judah," were successively deported by the Assyrian authorities, to remove a centre of perpetual disturbance.

The "ten tribes" who were the first to be deported, consisting as they did of elements more adaptable to their surroundings than the Judæans, settled down in Babylonia and gradually adapted themselves to their new environment; it would be interesting to know what development occurred in the schools of *their* prophets in contact with the ancient Chaldæan wisdom, and the subsequent history of that "Israel" which not only thus settled in Babylon, but remained there.

When the more turbulent Judæan tribes were subsequently in their turn deported, some of them followed the example of their kinsfolk; but most of the Judæans refused to adapt themselves to the new conditions, they pined for their freedom, and in spite of their being surrounded by the monuments of a great civilisation, looked back to their poor settlement of Jerusalem as though it had been in the land of Paradise, and its meagre homes the palaces of kings. The fathers wove for the children stories of the beauty and richness of their native land, of the glories of its palaces, and the great deeds of their ancient sheiks; above all things they insisted on their peculiar destiny as men who had made a compact with a God who had promised them victory over all foes. The fathers, who had gradually grown to believe their own stories, died before the conqueror Cyrus, in gratitude for their help against the Assyrian power, granted the return of the Judæan

folk. Those who returned were of the next generation, and they reoccupied the ruins of Jerusalem with ideas of a former greatness which existed in the poetic imagination and love of freedom of their sires rather than in actual history.

Filled with an enthusiasm for the past, they wrote what their fathers had told them, expanding the old records into a splendid "history," and bringing into it all that they had developed of religion by controversy with the Babylonians and Persians—a controversy which consisted in persistently maintaining that their religion was better than their opponents', claiming the best in their opponents' position or tradition as their own, and ever asserting that they had something still higher as well.

Honest Self-delusion.

Now the Jew had such a firm conviction that he was the Chosen of God that he probably really believed all his assertions; in any case the sense of history did not exist in those days, and there was no one to check the enthusiasm of these early scribes.

They probably argued: We are the chosen people of God; our religion is better than any other religion, in fact all other religions are false, all other Gods false; the palmy days of our religion were before the Captivity; those times must have been greater than the best times in other nations, our temple must have been grander, our sacrifices greater than any other in the world; our fathers have said it and we feel it is true. In such a frame of mind and with the innate poetic fervour

of their nature they felt impelled to write, and by their writing transformed the old records out of all historic recognition, and from such beginnings gradually evolved a literature which future generations received without question, not only as a precise record of fact but as a divinely written scripture verbally inspired.

The development of this literature was a natural growth, though the distinct factors which played a part in it are somewhat difficult to disentangle; but there are distinct signs of repeated modifications of cruder conceptions, and of the leavening of the nation by a steadily developing spiritual force. Whence came this persistent spiritualizing of the old conceptions?

The Spiritualizing of Judaism.

In seeking for an answer to this question, the point of departure may be found in the fact that the majority of the nation did not return; and not only this, but that the majority of the Jews in course of time preferred to live among the Gentiles. In fact the members of the nation gradually became the great traders of the ancient world, so that we find colonies of them scattered abroad in all the great centres; for instance, shortly after the founding of Alexandria we hear of a colony of no fewer than 40,000 Jews planted there. These Jews of the Diaspora or Dispersion were in constant contact with their Palestinian co-religionists on the one side, and on the other in intimate contact with the great civilizations in which they found a home.

Zealotism.

The expectation of the salvation of the race and of a Saviour of the race, which the Jews absorbed from Zoroastrianism, they adapted to

their own needs and to the conviction that Israel was the Chosen of God. This expectation was for long entirely of a material nature; they looked for a king who should restore them to freedom and tread under foot the nations of the world, when he would reign for one thousand years in Jerusalem. All this was to be effected by the direct interposition of Yahweh, their God. For some four hundred years, up to the final destruction of Jerusalem by Titus, we are presented with the spectacle of a most determined struggle for freedom; for the Jews were ever disappointed of their hopes, and had to submit to the successive overlordship of Greece and Rome. But hope ever sprang up again and again after every new disappointment, and we find in their literature the record of a determined opposition to the conqueror, fanned into fever heat by the fiery exhortations and denunciations of a pseudoprophetical character which has no parallel in the history of the world. If in the Greek genius was centred the struggle for the freedom of the intellect, in the Jewish nation was centred the struggle for personal freedom; and in the Roman Empire, after the destruction of Jerusalem, Jewry finally became the centre of all disaffection and revolutionary ideas.

Pharisaism.

At the back of all of this was the peculiarly exclusive faith which the Jew had evolved, and which from a Roman point of view constituted him "the hater of mankind." But this fanatical Zealotism, although it was directly nourished by the more unbalanced pronouncements of the religious writers and prophets, became more and more dis-

tasteful to the better elements in the nation. These better elements we find represented by the more spiritual views that by degrees worked into the sacred literature, and the nation was gradually leavened by Pharisaism, which, though running to the extreme of minute ceremonial and the most elaborate rules of external purity, was nevertheless a most potent factor in the widening of the religious horizon. The external side of Pharisaism is fairly well known to us; but the inner side of this great movement, to which all the most learned of the Jews belonged, is but little understood.

Pharisaism was in course of time divided into numerous schools, the strictest of which led the life of rigid internal purity. Leading such a life, it could not but be that their ideas became of a more spiritual nature; indeed Pharisaism had its origin in Babylon, and it represented the main stream of Chaldæan and Persian influence on Jewry.

Along this line of tradition we find gradually evolved a far more spiritual view of the Messiah-doctrine; Israel was not the physical nation of the Jews, but the Elect of God chosen out of all nations; the servants of God were those who served Him with their hearts and not with their lips; the God of this Israel abhorred their blood sacrifices.

The Chassidim and Essenes.

But such views as these, although they indirectly influenced the public scripture of the nation, could not be boldly declared among a people that had ever stoned its prophets and delighted in blood-sacrifice. Such views could only be safely discussed in private, and we find numerous records of the

existence of schools of Chassidim and those whom Josephus calls Essenes, among whom were the most pure and learned of the Jews, the "Rabbis of the South," living apart and in retirement.

These schools and communities seem to have looked back to the stern physical discipline of the Schools of the Prophets on the one hand, and to have been in contact with the spiritual ideas of the Babylonian wisdom-discipline on the other.

The Inner Schools.

In Babylon we see how one of the nation's seers contacted part of the Chaldæan wisdom-tradition, and the famous "Vision of Ezekiel" was subsequently invoked as canonical authority for all that range of ideas which we find revived so many hundreds of years later in Mediæval Kabalism. But in order to understand the nature of the studies and inner experiences of the members of these mystic schools of Chassidim and their imitators, it is necessary to have a critical acquaintance with non-canonical Jewish writings, especially the wisdom-literature and those numerous apocrypha, and apocalypses, and apologies for unfulfilled prophecy — a mass of pseudepigraphs which were so busily produced in the last centuries preceding our era and in its earliest centuries. It is true we possess only the fragmentary remains of this once enormous literature, most probably only the works that were written for general circulation, and principally by those members of these communities who were still obsessed by the Zealot conception of Israel; but enough remains to fill in some very necessary outlines of the background of the Gnosis, and to enable us to realise how

earnestly men were striving for a purer life and greater knowledge of God in those early days.

These mystic schools of Jewish theosophy had an enormous influence on nascent Christianity; the innermost schools influenced the inner schools of Christendom, and the general literature of the intermediate circles left a deep mark on general Christianity.

Most of these mystic schools and communities, whether of Greek or Egyptian or Jewish descent, when they came in contact with each other, gave and received. True that some of them refused to mix in person or doctrine, and there were rigidly conservative mystic schools of all three lines of descent; others, however, if not in their corporate capacity, at any rate in the persons of their individual members, gave and received, and so modified their preconceptions and enlarged their horizon. Indeed, in the last two centuries prior to and first two centuries of our era there was an enormous enthusiasm for syncretism and syntheticism among the members of such schools, the effects of which are plainly traceable in the fragments of the Gnosis preserved to us by the polemical citations of the heresiologists of later orthodoxy.

ALEXANDRIA.

The rough outlines of the background of the Gnosis which we have endeavoured to sketch, are of necessity of the vaguest, for each of the many

subjects touched upon is deserving of a volume or several volumes. Our intention has only been to give some general idea of the manifold lines along which its complicated heredity has to be traced. But our sketch is so vague that perhaps it may be as well, before proceeding further, to give the reader some notion of the more immediate *outer* conditions in which the Christian Gnosis lived and —we will not say died, but—disappeared. Insistence upon some of the points already touched upon and a few more details may serve to make the matter clearer; and the best spot from which to make our observation is Alexandria, and the best time for a retrospect is the epoch when General Christianity had definitely won its victory and driven the Gnosis from the field.

It should be remembered that in the following sketch we shall attempt to depict only the outer appearances of things; within, as we have already suggested and as we shall show in the sequel, there was a hidden life of great activity. If there was an enormous public library at Alexandria, there were also many private libraries of the inner schools dealing with the sacred science of unseen things. It was precisely from these private circles that all mystic writings proceeded, and we can see from the nature of the Gnostic and other works of this kind which have reached us, that their authors and compilers had access to large libraries of mystic lore.

A Bird's-eye View of the City.

Let us then carry our minds foward to the last quarter of the fourth century of the present era, when Hypatia was a girl, after the hopes

of the School that traced its descent through Plato and Pythagoras from Orpheus, had received so rude a shock from the early death of Julian, the emperor-philosopher; just in time to see the Serapeum still standing, unviolated by the iconoclastic hands of a fanaticism that was the immediate progeny of Jewish Zealotism and entirely foreign to the teaching of the Christ. Let us ascend the great lighthouse, 400 feet high, on the island off the mainland, the world-famous Pharos, and take a bird's-eye view of the intellectual centre of the ancient Western world.

The city lies out before us on a long ribbon of land or isthmus, between the sea front and the great lake towards the south, Lake Mareotis. Far away to the left is the most westerly mouth of the Nile, called the Canopic, and a great canal winds out that way to Canopus, where is the sacred shrine of Serapis. Along it, if it were festival-time, you would see crowds of pilgrims, hastening, on gaily decorated barges, to pay their homage to certain wise priests, one of whom about this time was a distinguished member of the later Platonic School.

The great city with its teeming populace stretches out before us with a sea-frontage of some four or five miles; in shape it is oblong, for when Alexander the Great, hundreds of years ago, in 331 B.C., marked out its original walls with the flour his Macedonian veterans carried (perhaps according to some national rite), he traced it in the form of a chlamys, a scarf twice as long as it was broad. Two great streets or main arteries, in the form

of a cross, divide it into four quarters. These thoroughfares are far wider than any of our modern streets, and the longer one, parallel to the shore, and extending through the outlying suburbs, has a length of three leagues, so that the Alexandrians consider it quite a journey to traverse their city.

Where these streets cross is a great square surrounded with handsome buildings, and adorned with fountains, statues and trees. There are many other squares and forums also, but none so vast as the great square. Many pillars and obelisks adorn the city; the most conspicuous of them being a flat-topped pillar of red stone, on a hill near the shore, and two obelisks on the shore itself, one of which is the present Cleopatra's Needle.

The island on which we are standing is joined to the main-land by a huge mole almost a mile long, with two water-ways cutting it, spanned with bridges, and defended with towers. This mole helps to form the great harbour on our right, and the smaller and less safe harbour on our left. There is also a third huge dock, or basin, in the north-west quarter of the city, closed also by a bridge.

The two main thoroughfares divide Alexandria into four quarters, which together with the first suburb of the city were originally called by the first five letters of the alphabet. The great quarter on our left is, however, more generally known as the Bruchion, perhaps from the palace Ptolemy Soter set aside to form the nucleus of the great library. It is the Greek quarter, the most fashionable, and architecturally very magnificent. There you see the vast

mausoleum of Alexander the Great, containing the golden coffin in which the body of the world-conquering hero has been preserved for hundreds of years. There, too, are the splendid tombs of the Ptolemies, who ruled Egypt from the time of the division of Alexander's empire till the latter part of the first century B.C. when the Romans wrested the kingdom from Cleopatra. Observe next the great temple of Poseidon, god of the sea, a favourite deity of the sailor populace. There, too, is the Museum, the centre of the university, with all its lecture rooms and halls, not the original Museum of the Ptolemies, but a later building. Baths, too, you see everywhere, thousands of them, magnificent buildings where the luxurious Alexandrians spend so much of their time.

On the right is the Egyptian quarter, the north-western, called Rhacotis, a very old name dating back to a time when Alexandria did not exist, and an old Egyptian burg, called Ragadouah, occupied its site. The difference in the style of achitecture at once strikes you, for it is for the most part in the more sombre Egyptian style; and that great building you see in the eastern part of the quarter is the far-famed Serapeum; it is not so much a single building as a group of buildings, the temple of course being the chief of them. It is a fort-like place, with plain heavy walls, older than the Greek buildings, gloomy and severe and suited to the Egyptian character; it is the centre of the "Heathen" schools, that is to say, the Barbarian or non-Greek lecture halls. You will always remember the Serapeum by its vast flights of steps bordered with

innumerable sphinxes, both inside and outside the great gate.

If you could see underneath the buildings, you would be struck with the network of vaults and crypts on which the whole city seems to have been built; these vaults are used mostly as underground cisterns for the storage of water—a most necessary provision in so poorly rain-fed a country as Egypt.

The south-eastern quarter, behind the Bruchion, is the centre of the Jewish colony, which dates back to the days of Alexander himself, and has never numbered less than 40,000 Hebrews.

The great open space to the left of the Bruchion is the Hippodrome or race-course, and further east still along the shore is the fashionable suburb of Nicopolis, where perchance Hypatia lives. On the other side of the city, beyond Rhacotis, is a huge cemetery adorned with innumerable statues and columns, and known as Necropolis.

The Populace.

But the various styles of architecture and distinct characteristics of the various quarters can give but little idea of the mixed and heterogeneous populace assembled on the spot where Europe, Asia, and Africa meet together. First you have the better class Egyptians and Greeks, mostly extremely refined, haughty and effeminate; of Romans but a few—the magistrates and military, the legionaries of the guard who patrolled the city and quelled the frequent riots of religious disputants; for all of whom, Jew or Christian, Gnostic or Heathen, they had a bluff and impartial contempt.

In the more menial offices you see the lower-class

mixed Egyptians, the descendants of the aboriginal populace, perchance, crowds of them. Thousands of Ethiopians and negroes also, in the brightest possible colours.

There, too, you see bands of monks from the Thebaid, many from the Nitrian Valley, two or three days' journey south into the desert, beyond the great lake; they are easily distinguishable, with their tangled unkempt locks, and skins for sole clothing—for the most part at this time a violent, ignorant, and ungovernable set of fanatics. Mixed with them are people in black, ecclesiastics, deacons and officers of the Christian churches.

Down by the harbours, however, we shall come across many other types, difficult to distinguish for the most part because of the interblending and mixture. Thousands of them come and go on the small ships which crowd the harbours in fleets. Many are akin to the once great nation of the so-called "Hittites"; Phœnician and Carthaginian sailor-folk in numbers, and traders from far more distant ports.

Jews everywhere and those akin to Jews, in all the trading parts; some resembling Afghans; ascetics, too, from Syria, descended from the Essenes, perchance, or Therapeutæ, paying great attention to cleanliness. Also a few tall golden-haired people, Goths and Teutons perchance, extremely contemptuous of the rest, whom they regard as an effeminate crowd—big, tall, strong, rough fellows. A few Persians also, and more distant Orientals.

Perhaps, however, you are more interested in the

Christian populace, a most mixed crowd without and within. The city ecclesiastics are busied more with politics than with religion; the rest of the faithful can be divided into two classes, offering widely different presentments of Christianity.

On the one hand, the lowest classes and many of the monks, bigoted and ignorant, contemptuous of all education, devoted to the cult of the martyrs, thirsting for the blood of the Jews, and wild to overthrow every statue and raze every temple to the ground. On the other hand, a set of refined disputants, philosophical theologians, arguing always, eager to enter the lists with the Pagan philosophers, spending their lives in public discussions, while the crowds who come to hear them are mostly indifferent to the right or wrong of the matter, and applaud every debating point with contemptuous impartiality, enjoying the wrangle from the point of view of a refined scepticism.

The Library.

But we must hasten on with our task, and complete our sketch of the city with a brief reference to two of its most famous institutions, the Library and Museum. Even if most of us have had no previous acquaintance with the topography of Alexandria, and are perfectly ignorant of the history of its schools, we have at any rate all heard of its world-famed Library.

When the kingdom of Alexander was divided among his generals, the rich kingdom of Egypt fell to the lot of Ptolemy I., called Soter, the Saviour. Believing that Greek culture was the most civilising factor in the known world, and Greek methods the

most enlightened, Soter determined not only to make a small Greece in Egypt, but also to make his court at Alexandria the asylum of all the learning of the Grecian world. Fired with this noble ambition he founded a Museum or University, dedicated to the arts and sciences, and a Library. Had not Aristotle the philosopher taught his great leader, Alexander, the art of government; and should not the chief of his generals therefore gather together all the works that dealt with so useful a science? Fortunately, however, the original plan of a purely political library was speedily abandoned and more universal views prevailed. It is, however, not unlikely that Ptolemy, as an Egyptian ruler, did but found a new library for his capital in emulation of the many libraries already existing in that ancient land. We have only to recall the vast collection of Osymandyas at Thebes, the "Remedy of the Soul," to be persuaded of the fact. Therefore, though the Alexandrian Library was the first great public Grecian library, it was by no means the first in Egypt. Nor was it even the first library in Greece; for Polycrates of Samos, Pisistratus and Eucleides of Athens, Nicocrates of Cyprus, Euripides the poet, and Aristotle himself, had all large collections of books.

To be brief; the first collection was placed in the part of the royal palaces near the Canopic Gate, the chief of these palaces being called the Bruchion, close to the Museum. A librarian and a staff were appointed—an army of copyists and calligraphists. There were also scholars to revise and correct the

texts, and chōrizontes (χωρίζοντες) to select the authentic and best editions; also makers of catalogues, categories and analytics.

Under the first Ptolemies the collecting of books became quite a mania. Ptolemy Soter had letters sent to all the reigning sovereigns begging for copies of every work their country possessed, whether of poets, logographers, or writers of sacred aphorisms, orators, sophists, doctors, medical philosophers, historians, etc. Ptolemy II. (Philadelphus) commissioned every captain of a vessel to bring him MSS., for which he paid so royally that many forgeries were speedily put on the market. Attalus and Eumenes, kings of Pergamus, in north-west Asia Minor, established a rival library in their capital, and prosecuted the search for books with such ardour that the library of Aristotle, bequeathed to Theophrastus and handed on to Neleus of Scepsis, had to be buried to escape the hands of their rapacious collectors, only to find its way, however, to Alexandria at last. Philadelphus accordingly issued an order against the exportation of papyrus from Egypt, and thus the rival collectors of Pergamus had to be content with vellum; hence, some say, pergamene, parchemin, parchment. The commerce of MSS. was carried on throughout all Greece, Rhodes and Athens being the chief marts.

Thus Alexandria became possessed of the most ancient MSS. of Homer and Hesiod and the Cyclic poets; of Plato and Aristotle, of Æschylus, Sophocles and Euripides, and many other treasures.

Moreover, large numbers of translators were

employed to turn the books of other nations into Greek. The sacred books of the nations were translated, and the Septuagint version of the Hebrew Bible was added to the number, not without miracle, if we are to believe the legend recounted by Josephus.

Even by the time of Ptolemy III. (Euergetes) the Bruchion could not contain all the books, and a fresh nucleus was established in the buildings of the Serapeum, on the other side of the city, but not in the temple itself with its four hundred pillars, of all of which Pompey's Pillar alone remains to us.

What a wealth of books in so short a time! Even in the times of the first three Ptolemies, we read of 400,000 rolls or volumes. What then must have been the number in later years? Some say they exceeded a million rolls and papyri. Let us, however, remember that a "book" or "roll" was generally not a volume as with us, but rather the chapter of a work. We read of men writing "six thousand books"! The rolls had to be comparatively small, for the sake of convenience, and a work often had as many rolls as it contained books. We must, therefore, bearing this in mind, be on our guard against exaggerating the size of the great Library.

The Serapeum, however, soon contained as many books as the Bruchion, and all went well till 47 B.C., when the great fire which destroyed Cæsar's fleet, burnt the Bruchion to the ground. An imaginative versifier, Lucian, asserts that the glow of the conflagration could be seen as far as Rome!

So they had to rebuild the Bruchion, and put into the new building the famous library of Pergamus,

which the city had bequeathed to the Senate, and which the infatuated Mark Antony handed over to Cleopatra, last of the Ptolemies.

When the glory of Alexandria began to depart, its library began to share its fate. Julian, the emperor (360-363), took many volumes to enrich his own library; when the "Christian" fanatics in 387 stormed the Serapeum, they razed the temple to its foundation, and nothing of the library was left but the empty shelves. Finally in 641 Amru, general of Omar, second in sucession to the Prophet, fed the furnaces of the 4000 baths of Alexandria for full six months with the Bruchion's priceless treasures. If what the rolls contained were in the Korān, they were useless, if what they taught were not in the Korān, they were pernicious; in either case, burn them! Some Mohammedan apologists have lately tried to whitewash Omar and deny the whole story; but perhaps he is as little to be excused as the "Christian" barbarians who devastated the shelves of the Serapeum.

The Museum.

Such was the written material on which the scholars, scientists and philosophers of Alexandria had to work. And not only was there a library, but also a kind of university, called the Museum, dedicated to the arts and sciences, and embracing among other things an observatory, an amphitheatre of anatomy, a vast botanical garden, an immense menagerie, and many other collections of things useful for physical research.

It was an institution conceived on a most liberal plan, an assembly of savants lodged in a palace,

richly endowed with the liberality of princes, exempt from public charges. Without distinction of race or creed, with no imposed regulations, no set plan of study or lecture lists, the members of this distinguished assembly were left free to prosecute their researches and studies untrammelled and unhampered. In their ranks were innumerable poets, historians, geometricians, mathematicians, astronomers, translators, critics, commentators, physicians, professors of natural science, philologists, grammarians, archæologists; in brief, savants of all sorts laying the first foundations of those researches which have once more in our own time, after the lapse of centuries, claimed the attention of the world. True, the Museum of Alexandria made but faltering steps where we to-day stride on with such assurance; but the spirit and method were the same, feeble compared to our strength, but the same spirit now made strong by palingenesis.

Very like was the temper then, in the last three centuries before the Christian era, to the temper that has marked the last three centuries of our own time. Religion had lost its hold on the educated; scepticism and "science" and misunderstood Aristotelian philosophy were alone worthy of a man of genius. There were "emancipated women" too, "dialectical daughters," common enough in those latter days of Greece.

Had not, thought these schoolmen, their great founder, Alexander, conquered the political world by following the advice of his master Aristotle? They

also, would follow the teaching of the famous Stagirite, who had mapped out heaven and earth and all things therein, and soon they too would conquer what else of the world there was to be conquered, both natural and intellectual. It seemed so probable then, so simple and logical. It seems to be probable even now—to some minds!

So they set to work with their commenting, and criticizing, their philologizing, their grammar, and accentuation, their categorizing and cataloguing. They set to work to measure things; being pupils of Euclid, they attempted to measure the distance of the sun from the earth; and Eratosthenes, by copper armillæ, or circles for determining the equinox, calculated the obliquity of the ecliptic, and by further researches calculated the circumference of the earth; he also mapped out the world from all the books of travel and earth-knowledge in the great Library. In mechanics, Archimedes solved the mysteries of the lever and hydrostatic pressue which are the basis of our modern statics and hydrostatics. Hipparchus too thought out a theory of the heavens, upside down in fact, but correct enough to calculate eclipses and the rest; and this, three hundred years later, under the Antonines, was revamped by a certain Ptolemy, a commentator merely and not an inventor, the patent now standing in his name. Hipparchus was also the father of plane and spherical trigonometry.

But enough has already been said to give us an idea of the temper of the times, and it would be too long to dwell on the long list of famous names in

other departments—encyclopædists and grammarians like Callimachus and Aristophanes; poets such as Theocritus.

Thus with the destruction of the building in the fire of Cæsar's fleet and with the Roman conquest the first Museum came to an end. It is true that a new Museum was established in the reign of Claudius (41-50 A.D.), but it was a mere shadow of its former self, no true home of the Muses, but the official auditorium of the wearisome writings of an emperor-scribbler. Claudius had written in Greek, *magis inepte quam ineleganter*, as Suetonius remarks, eight books of a history of Carthage, and twenty books of a history of Etruria. He would, therefore, establish a Museum and have his precious writings read to sycophant professordom once a year at least. Thus passed away the glory of that incarnation of scholarship and science; it was a soulless thing at best, marking a period of unbelief and scepticism, and destined to pass away when once man woke again to the fact that he was a soul.

The Schools of the Sophists.

And what of the outer schools of so-called philosophy during that period? They, too, were barren enough. The old sages of Greece were no more. Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle had passed from the sight of mortals. The men who followed them were for the most part word-splitters and phrase-weavers. Dialectic arguers of the Megaran school, Eristics or wranglers, Pyrrhonists or doubters, Cyrenaics who believed in the senses alone as the only avenues of knowledge, pessimists and annihilationists, a host of later

Sceptics, Cynics, Epicureans, Academics, Peripatetics and Stoics—Epicureans who sought to live comfortably; Stoics who, in opposition to Plato's doctrine of social virtues, asserted the solitary dignity of human individualism.

After the three great reigns of the first Ptolemies, Alexandria fell morally, together with its rulers; for one hundred and eighty years "sophists wrangled, pedants fought over accents and readings with the true *odium grammaticum*," till Cleopatra, like Helen, betrayed her country to the Romans, and Egypt became a tributary province. So far there had been no philosophy in the proper sense of the word; that did not enter into the curriculum of the Museum.

The Dawn-Land.

Hitherto Alexandria had had no philosophy of her own, but now she is destined to be the crucible in which philosophic thought of every kind will be fused together;—and not only philosophy, but more important still, religio-philosophy and theosophy of every kind will be poured into the melting pot, and many strange systems and some things admirably good and true will be moulded out of the matter cast into this seething crucible. So far the Grecian genius has only thought of airing its own methods and views before the East. Into Egypt, Syria, Persia, into India even, it has flitted and sunned itself. It has taken many a year to convince Greek complacency that the period of world-genius is not bounded on one hand by Homer and on the other by Aristotle. Slowly but remorselessly it is borne in upon Hellenic ingenuity that there is an antiquity in the world beside which

it is a mere *parvenu.* The Greek may despise the Orientals and call them mere "barber" or Barbarians, because they are strangers to the Attic tongue; but the Barbarian is to laugh last and laugh best after all, for he has a carefully guarded heirloom of wisdom, which he has not yet quite forgotten. The Greeks have had the tradition, too, and have even revived it, but have now forgotten again; the sceptics have replaced Orpheus by Homer, and Pythagoras and the real Plato by Aristotle. Their Mysteries are now masonic and no longer real—except for the very very few.

And if the Greek despised the Barbarian, the Barbarian, in his turn, thought but little of the Greek. "You Greeks are but children, O Solon," said the wise priest of Saïs to the Attic law-giver. You Greeks misunderstand and change the sacred myths you have adopted, fickle and careless, and superficial in things religious. Such was the criticism of the ancient Barbarian on the young and innovating Greek.

Slowly but surely the wisdom of the Egyptians, of the Babylonians and Chaldæans, and its reflection in some of the Jewish doctors, of Persia, too, and perhaps even of India, begins to react on the centre of Grecian thought, and religion and all the great problems of the human soil begin to oust mere scholasticism, *beaux arts* and *belles lettres*, from the schools; Alexandria is no longer to be a mere literary city, but a city of philosophy in the old sense of the term: it is to be wisdom-loving; not that it will eventually succeed even in this, but it will try to succeed.

There is to be a new method too. The concealed and hidden for so many centuries will be discussed and analyzed; there will be eclecticism, or a choosing out and synthesizing; there will be syncretism and a mingling of the most heterogeneous elements into some sort of patchwork; there will be analogeticism or comparison and correspondencing; efforts to discover a world-religion; to reconcile the irreconcilable; to synthesize as well science, philosophy and religion; to create a theosophy. It will apparently fail, for the race is nearing its end; it is the searching for truth at the end of a long life with an old brain, with too many old tendencies and prejudices to eradicate. The race will die and the souls that ensouled it will go out of incarnation, to reappear in due time when the wheel has turned. The old race is to be replaced with new blood and new physical vigour; but the mind of the new race is incapable of grasping the problems of its predecessors: Goths, Teutons, Vandals, Huns, Celts, Britons, and Arabs are bodies for a far less developed batch of souls. True the new race will also grow and develop and in its turn reach to manhood and old age, and far transcend its predecessor in every way; but when a child it will think as a child, when a man as a man, and when aged as the aged. What could the barbarian Huns and Goths and Arabs make of the great problems that confronted the highly civilised Alexandrians?

For the new race a new religion therefore, suited to its needs, suited perchance to its genius, suited to its age. What its actual historic origins were are so far shrouded in impenetrable obscurity; what

the real history of its Founder was is impossible to discover.

This much, however, is certain, that a new key-note was struck for the tuning up of the new instrument. It is always a dangerous thing to generalize too freely, and paint the past in too staring splashes of colour, for in human affairs we find nothing unmixed; good was mixed with evil in the old method, and evil with good in the new. The new method was to force out into the open for all men a portion of the sacred Mysteries and secret teachings of the few. The adherents of the new religion itself professed to throw open "everything"; and many believed that it had revealed all that was revealable. That was because they were as yet children. So bright was the light to them that they perforce believed it came directly from the God of all gods—or rather from God alone, for they would have no more of gods; the gods were straightway transmuted into devils. The "many" had begun to play with psychic and spiritual forces, let loose from the Mysteries, and the "many" went mad for a time, and have not yet regained their sanity. Let us dwell on this intensely interesting phenomenon for a few moments.

The New Religion.

It is true that in the Roman Empire, which had now reduced the "world" to its sway, and thus politically united so many streams of ancient civilisation and barbarism into one ocean, things were in a very parlous state, morally and socially. The ancient order was beginning to draw to an end. Political freedom and independence were of the past, but

intellectual and religious tolerance were still guaranteed, for so far the ancient world knew not the meaning of intolerance.

States were politically subordinated to the control of the Cæsars, but the religious institutions of such states, on which their social life and national existence depended, were left in absolute freedom. Nevertheless the spirit of reality had long left the ancient institutions; they were still maintained as part and parcel of statecraft, and as necessary for the people, who must have a cult, and festivals, and religious shows, then as now; but few took the matter really seriously. For the educated there was philosophy, and the shadow of the ancient Mysteries.

But these things were not for the people, not for the uneducated; the priestly orders had forgotten their duties, and, using their knowledge for self-aggrandisement, had now almost entirely forgotten what they once had known. It is an old, old story. The ancient church was corrupt, the ancient state enslaved. There must be a protest, partly right, partly wrong, as usual good and evil protesting against evil and good.

It is true that the Mysteries are free and open to all—who are worthy.

It is true that morals and virtues are absolutely essential pre-requisites—but not these alone.

It is true that there is One God—but Yahweh is not that Deity.

It is true that there are grades of being and intelligence between the Supreme and man—but

the gods are not the work of men's hands or devils, while the angels are creatures of light.

It is true that philosophy alone cannot solve the problem—but it must not be neglected.

It is true that all men will be "saved"—but not rather the poor than the rich, the ignorant than the learned.

In protestantism in things religious there is no middle ground among the uninstructed. They fly to the opposite pole. Therefore, when the new impulse seizes on the people, we are to have a breaking down of old barriers and a striving after a new order of things, but at the same time a wild intolerance, a glorification of ignorance, a wholesale condemnation; a social upheaval, followed by a political triumph. One thing, however, is acquired definitely, a new lease of life for faith.

It was good for the people to believe with all their heart after so much disbelief; it was good for them to make virtue paramount as the first all-necessary step to a knowledge of God. It was good to set aside the things of the body and love the things of the soul; it was good to bring reality of life once more into the hearts of men.

What might have been if more temperate counsels had prevailed, who can say?

The main fact was that one race was dying and another being born. The memories of the past crowded into the old brain, but the new brain was unable to register them except in their cruder forms. The memory which succeeded in eventually impressing itself with most distinctness on the new brain, was

perchance the most suited to the vigorous and warlike races that were to replace the old races of the Roman Empire; this memory was the tradition of the Jew.

We are of course in this only looking at the popular and outer side of the great movement which transformed the general religious consciousness of the ancient world. Within was much of great excellence, only a portion of which could be understood by the young brain of the new race. But now that the race is growing into manhood it will remember more of it; it has already recovered its memory of science and philosophy, and its memory of religion will doubtless ere long be brought through.

Jewish and Christian Schools.

We are still, however, looking at the outer conditions among which the Gnosis was working. At Alexandria, ever since its foundation, the Jews had been an important element in the life of the city. Though the translation of the Hebrew scriptures by the so-called "Seventy" had been begun in the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, it does not seem to have attracted the attention of the Greek official savants. Jewish ideas at Alexandria were at that time confined to Jews,—and naturally so, for in the beginning these most exclusive and intolerant religionists kept their ideas to themselves and guarded them jealously from the Gentiles. Later on the Jewish schools at Alexandria were so esteemed by their nation throughout the East, that the Alexandrian Rabbis were known as the "Light of Israel," and continued to be the centre of

Jewish thought and learning for several centuries. Within these it was that the Jews perfected their theories of religion and worked out what they had gleaned of "kabalistic" lore from the Chaldæans and Babylonians, and also from the wisdom-traditions of Egypt.

Many of the Hebrew doctors, moreover, were students of Grecian thought and literature, and are therefore known as Hellenists. Some of these wrote in Greek, and it was chiefly through their works that the Grecian world derived its information on things Jewish.

Aristobulus, whose date is unknown, but is conjecturally about B.C. 150, had endeavoured to maintain that the Peripatetic philosophy was derived from Moses—a wild theory that was subsequently developed and expanded to a ludicrous extent, and (Plato being substituted for Aristotle) was in the greatest favour even among such enlightened Church Fathers as Clement of Alexandria and Origen. This theory of Aristobulus was the forerunner of the still more fantastic theory, invented by Justin Martyr, that the wisdom of antiquity, wherever found, was a "plagiarism by anticipation" of the Devil, in order to spite the new religion; and this pitiful hypothesis has been faithfully reproduced by Christian apologists almost down to our own time.

Philo (circa B.C. 25—A.D. 45), however, is the most renowned of the Hellenists. He was a great admirer of Plato, and his work brings out many similarities between Rabbinical religious thought and Greek philosophy. It is true that Philo's method of allegorical exegesis, whereby he reads high philosophical conceptions into the crude narratives of the myths of Israel, is no longer regarded as legimitate; but his writings are nevertheless of great value. Philo believed not only that the Old Covenant documents were inspired in every part, but also that every name therein contained a hidden meaning of highest import. In this way he strove to explain away the crudities of the literal narrative.

But though Philo's method—whereby he could invoke the authority of "Moses" for the ideas of his school—is scientifically inadmissible, when the Bible documents are submitted to the searching of historic and philological criticism, nevertheless his numerous tractates are of great importance as supplying us with a record of the ideas which were current in the circles or schools with which Philo was in contact. They are a precious indication of the existence of communities who thought as Philo thought, and a valuable means of becoming acquainted with the scope of the Jewish Gnosis in a propagandist form.

Josephus (A.D. 37—100), the famous historian, also wrote in Greek, and so made known his nation far and wide throughout the Græco-Roman world.

Here, therefore, we have indications of the direct points of contact between Greek and propagandist Jewish thought. Now Christianity in its popular origins had entirely entangled itself with the popular Jewish tradition of religion, a tradition that was innocent of all philosophy or kabalistic mysticism. The Gentiles who were admitted into the new faith,

however, soon grew restive at the imposition of the rite of circumcision, which the earliest propagandists insisted upon; and so the first "heresy" arose, and the "Church of Jerusalem," which remained essentially Jewish in all things, speedily resolved itself into a narrow sect, even for those who regarded Judaism as the only forerunner of the new faith. As time went on, however, and either men of greater education joined their ranks, or in their propaganda they were forced to study themselves to meet the objections of educated opponents, wider and more liberal views obtained among a number of the Christians, and the other great religious traditions and philosophies contacted the popular stream. All such views, however, were looked upon with great suspicion by the "orthodox," or rather that view which finally became orthodox. And so as time went on, even the very moderate liberalism of Clemens and Origen was regarded as a grave danger; and with the triumph of narrow orthodoxy, and the condemnation of learning, Origen himself was at last anathematized.

It was the Alexandrian school of Christian philosophy, of which the most famous doctors were the same Clemens and Origen, which laid the first foundations of General Christian theology; and that school owed its evolution to its contact with Grecian thought. There is a pleasant story of its first beginnings to which we may briefly refer. Towards the end of the first century the Christians established a school in Alexandria, the city of schools. It was a Sunday-school for children, called the Didascaleion. With courageous faith it was established hard by the

door of the world-famous Museum, from whose chairs the general Christians, owing to their ignorance of art and science and philosophy, were excluded. From that same Sunday-school, however, arose the vast fabric of Catholic theology; for the teachers of the Didascaleion were forced to look to their laurels, and they soon numbered in their ranks men who had already received education in the Grecian schools of thought and training.

Such is a brief sketch of Alexandria and her schools, and it was in outer contact with such a seething world of thought and endeavour, that some of the greatest of the Gnostic doctors lived. They were found of course elsewhere in the world—in Syria, Asia Minor, and Italy, in Gaul and Spain; but the best picture of the ancient world with which they were in outer contact, is to be sketched in the city where Egypt and Africa, Rome and Greece, Syria and Arabia met together.

GENERAL AND GNOSTIC CHRISTIANITY.

THE EVOLUTION OF CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY.

THE historical origins of Christianity are hidden in impenetrable obscurity. Of the actual history of the first half of the first century we have no knowledge. Of the history of the next hundred years also we have for the most part to rely on conjecture. The now universally received canonical account was a selection from a mass of tradition and legend; it is only in the second half of the second century that the idea of a Canon of the New Testament makes its appearance, and is gradually developed by the Church of Rome and the Western Fathers. The early Alexandrian theologians, such as Clement, are still ignorant of a precise Canon. Following on the lines of the earliest apologists of a special view of Christianity, such as Justin, and using this evolving Canon as the sole test of orthodoxy, Irenæus, Tertullian and Hippolytus, supported by the Roman Church, lay the foundations of "catholicity,"

The Canon.

and begin to raise the first courses of that enormous edifice of dogma which is to-day regarded as the *only* authentic view of the Church of Christ.

The first two centuries, however, instead of confirming the boast of the later orthodox, "one church, one faith, always and everywhere," on the contrary present us with the picture of many lines of evolution of belief, practice, and organisation. The struggle for life was being fiercely waged, and though the "survival of the fittest" resulted as usual, there were frequent crises in which the final "fittest" is hardly discernible and at times disappears from view.

The Gospels.

The view of the Christian origins which eventually became the orthodox tradition based itself mainly upon Gospel-documents composed, in all probability, some time in the reign of Hadrian (A.D. 117-138). The skeleton of three of these Gospels was presumably a collection of Sayings and a narrative of Doings in the form of an ideal life, a sketch composed by one of the "Apostles" of the inner communities and designed for public circulation. Round this nucleus the compilers of the three documents wove other matter selected from a vast mass of myth, legend, and tradition; they were evidently men of great piety, and their selection of material produced narratives of great dignity, and cast aside much in circulation that was foolish and fantastic, the remains of which we have still preserved in some of the apocryphal Gospels. The writer of the fourth document was a natural mystic who adorned his account with a beauty of conception

and a charm of feeling that reflect the highest inspiration.

At the same time the canonical selection most fortunately preserved for us documents of far greater historic value.

The Letters of Paul.

In the Letters of Paul, the majority of which are in the main, I believe, authentic, we have the earliest historic records of Christianity which we possess. The Pauline Letters date back to the middle of the first century, and are the true point of departure for any really historic research into the origins. On reading these Letters it is almost impossible to persuade ourselves that Paul was acquainted with the statements of the later historicized account of the four canonical Gospels; all his conceptions breathe a totally different atmosphere.

Instead of preaching the Jesus of the historicized Gospels, he preaches the doctrine of the mystic Christ. He not only seems to be ignorant of the Doings but even of the Sayings in any form known to us; nevertheless it is almost certain that some collection of Sayings must have existed and been used by the followers of the public teaching in his time. Though innumerable opportunities occur in his writings for reference to the canonical Sayings and Doings, whereby the power of his exhortations would have been enormously increased, he abstains from making any. On the other hand, we find his Letters replete with conceptions and technical terms which receive no explanation in the traditions of General Christianity, but are fundamental with the handers-on of the Gnosis.

The picture which the letters of Paul give us of the actual state of affairs in the middle of the first century is that of an independent propagandist, with his own illumination, in contact with the ideas of an inner school on the one hand, and with outer communities of various kinds on the other. Whatever the inner schools may have been, the outer communities among which Paul laboured were Jewish, synagogues of the orthodox Jews, synagogues of the outer communities of the Essenes, communities which had received some tradition of the public teaching of Jesus as well, and understood or misunderstood it as the case may have been.

The Gentilisation of Christianity.

Paul's mission was to break down Jewish exclusiveness and pioneer the way for the gentilization of Christianity. The century which followed this propaganda of Paul (50-150) is, according to Harnack, characterised by the following features:

(i) The rapid disappearance of Jewish (that is to say, primitive and original) [popular] Christianity.

(ii) Every member of the community was supposed to have received the "Spirit of God"; the teaching was "charismatic," that is to say, of the nature of "spiritual gifts."

(iii) The expectation of the approaching end of the age, and the reign of Christ on earth for a thousand years — "chiliasm" — was in universal favour.

(iv) Christianity was a mode of life, not a dogma.

(v) There were no fixed doctrinal forms, and accordingly the greatest freedom in Christian preaching.

(vi) The Sayings of the Lord and the Old Testament were not as yet absolute authorities; the "Spirit" could set them aside.

(vii) There was no fixed political union of the Churches; each community was independent.

(viii) This period gave rise to "a quite unique literature, in which were manufactured facts for the past and for the future, and which did not submit to the usual literary rules and forms, but came forward with the loftiest pretensions."

(ix) Particular sayings and arguments of assumed "Apostolic Teachers" were brought forward as being of great authority.

At the same time, besides this gentilizing tendency, which was always really subordinated to the Jewish original impulse, though flattering itself that it had entirely shaken off the fetters of the "circumcision," there was a truly universalizing tendency at work in the background; and it is this endeavour to universalize Christianity which is the grand inspiration underlying the best of the Gnostic efforts we have to review. But this universalizing does not belong to the line of the origins along which General Christiaity subsequently traced its descent.

THE EBIONITES.

The Nazoræans.

Epiphanius would have it that the Christians were first called Iessæi, and says they are mentioned under this name in the writings of Philo. The followers of the earliest converts of Jesus are also said to have been called Nazoræi. Even towards the end of the fourth century the Nazoræans were still found scattered throughout Cœle-Syria, Decapolis, Pella (whither they fled at the destruction of Jerusalem), the region beyond Jordan, and far away to Mesopotamia. Their collection of the *logoi* was called *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*, and differed greatly from the synoptic accounts of the Canon. Even to this day a remnant of the Nazoræans is said by some to survive in the Mandaïtes, a strange sect dwelling in the marshes of Southern Babylonia, but their curious scripture, *The Book of Adam*, as preserved in the *Codex Nasaræus*, bears no resemblance whatever to the known fragments of *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*, though some of their rites are very similar to the rites of some communities of the "Righteous" referred to in that strange Jewish pseudepigraph *The Sibylline Oracles*.

Who the original Iessæans or Nazoræans were, is wrapped in the greatest obscurity; under another of their designations, however, the Ebionites or "Poor Men," we can obtain some further information. These early outer followers of Jesus were finally ostracized from the orthodox fold, and so completely

were their origin and history obscured by the subsequent industry of heresy-hunters, that we finally find them fathered on a certain Ebion, who is as non-existent as several other heretics, such as Epiphanes, Kolarbasus and Elkesai, who were invented by the zeal and ignorance of fourth-century hæresiologists and "historians." Epiphanes is the later personification of an unnamed "distinguished" *(epiphanes)* teacher; Kolarbasus is the personification of the "sacred four" *(kol-arba)*, and Elkesai the personification of the "hidden power" *(elkesai)*. So eager were the later refutators to add to their list of heretics, that they invented the names of persons from epithets and doctrines. So with Ebion.

The Poor Men.

The Ebionites were originally so called because they were "poor"; the later orthodox subsequently added "in intelligence" or "in their ideas about Christ." And this may very well have been the case, and doubtless many grossly misunderstood the public teaching of Jesus, for it should not be forgotten that one of the main factors to be taken into account in reviewing the subsequent rapid progress of the new religion was the social revolution. In the minds of the most ignorant of the earliest followers of the public teaching, the greatest hope aroused may well have been the near approach of the day when the "poor" should be elevated above the "rich." But this was the view of the most ignorant only; though doubtless they were numerous enough.

Nevertheless it was Ebionism which preserved the tradition of the earliest converts of the public teaching, and the Ebionite communities doubtless

possessed a collection of the public Sayings and based their lives upon them.

It was against these original followers of the public teaching of Jesus that Paul contended in his efforts to gentilize Christianity. For many a long year this Petro-Pauline controversy was waged with great bitterness, and the Canon of the New Testament is thought by some to have been the means adopted to form the basis of a future reconciliation; the Petrine and Pauline documents were carefully edited, and between the Gospel portion and the Pauline letters was inserted the new-forged link of the *Acts of the Apostles*, a carefully edited selection from a huge mass of legendary *Acts*, welded together into a narrative and embellished with speeches after the manner of Thucydides.

The Ebionite Tradition of Jesus.

How then did the original Ebionites view the person and teaching of Jesus? They regarded their leader as a wise man, a prophet, a Jonas, nay even a Solomon. Moreover, he was a manifestation of the Messiah, the Anointed, who was to come, but he had not yet appeared as the Messiah; that would only be at his second coming. In his birth as Jesus, he was a prophet simply. The New Dispensation was but the continuation of the Old Law; all was essentially Jewish. They therefore expected the coming of the Messiah as literally prophesied by their men of old. He was to come as king, and then all the nations would be subjected to the power of the Chosen People, and for a thousand years there would be peace and prosperity and plenty on earth.

Jesus was a man, born as all men, the human son of Joseph and Mary. It was only at his baptism, at thirty years of age, that the Spirit descended upon him and he became a prophet. They, therefore, guarded his Sayings as a precious deposit, handing them down by word of mouth. The Ebionites knew nothing of the pre-existence or divinity of their revered prophet. It is true that Jesus was "christ," but so also would all be who fulfilled the Law. Thus they naturally repudiated Paul and his new doctrine entirely; for them Paul was a deceiver and an apostate from the Law, they even denied that he was a Jew.

It was only later that they used *The Gospel according to the Hebrews*, which Jerome says was the same as *The Gospel of the Twelve Apostles* and *The Gospel of the Nazarenes*, that is to say, of the Nazoræans. It should be remembered that these Nazoræans knew nothing of the Nazareth legend, which was subsequently developed by the "in order that it might be fulfilled" school of historicizers.

The Ebionites did not return to Jerusalem when the emperor permitted the new colony of Ælia Capitolina to be established in 138, for no Jew was allowed to return. The new town was Gentile. Therefore, when we read of "the re-constitution of the mother church" at Ælia Colonia, in Church historians, little reliance can be placed upon such assertions. The "mother church," based on the public teaching, was Ebionite and remained Ebionite, the community at Ælia Colonia was Gentile and therefore Pauline.

Christianity, as understood by the Ebionites, being an essentially national doctrine, Paulinism was a necessity if any public attempt at universality was to be made; therefore it was that the true historical side of popular Christianity (the orginal Ebionite tradition) became more and more obscured, until finally it had so completely disappeared from the area of such tradition, that a new "history" could with safety be developed to suit the dogmatic evolution inaugurated by Paul.

The later forms of Ebionism, however, which survived for several centuries, were of a Gnostic nature, and reveal the contact of these outer communities of primitive Christendom based on the public teaching with an inner Jewish tradition, which evidently existed contemporaneously with Paul, and may have existed far earlier.

THE ESSENES.

BASING themselves on the Sayings preserved in the canonical Gospels and on the description of the communities given in the *Acts*, many have supposed that Jesus was a member of or intimately acquainted with the doctrines and discipline of the Essene communities. Who then were these Essenes or Healers?

For centuries before the Christian era Essene communities had dwelt on the shores of the Dead Sea. These Essenes or Essæans, in the days of Philo and Josephus, were imbued with the utmost reverence for Moses and the Law. They believed in God, the creator, in the immortality of the soul, and in a future state of retribution. Finding it impossible to carry out in ordinary life the minute regulations of the laws of purity, they had adopted the life of ascetic communism. Their chief characteristic was the doctrine of love—love to God, love of virtue, and love of mankind—and the practical way in which they carried out their precepts aroused the admiration of all.

Their strict observance of the purificatory discipline enacted by the Levitical institutions thus compelled them to become a self-supporting community; all worked at a trade, they cultivated their own fields, manufactured all the articles of food and dress which they used, and thus in every way avoided contact with those who did not observe the same rules. They also appear in their inner circles to have been strict celibates.

Their Manner of Life.

Their manner of life was as follows: they rose before the sun, and no word was uttered until they had assembled together and, with faces turned towards the dawn, offered up prayers for the renewal of the light. Each then went to his appointed task under the supervision of the stewards or overseers ("bishops") elected by universal suffrage. At eleven o'clock they again assembled and, putting off their working clothes, performed the daily rite of baptism in cold water; then clothing themselves in white linen robes, they proceeded to the common meal, which they regarded as a sacrament; the refectory was a "holy temple." They ate in silence, and the food was of the plainest—bread and vegetables. Before the meal a blessing was invoked, and at the end thanks were rendered. The members took their seats according to seniority. They then went forth to work again until the evening, when they again assembled for the common meal. Certain hours of the day, however, were devoted to the study of the mysteries of nature and of revelation, as well as of the powers of the celestial hierarchies, the names of the angels, etc.; for they had an inner instruction, which was guarded with the utmost secrecy.

This was the rule for the week-days, while the Sabbath was kept with extreme rigour. They had, however, no priests, and any one who was "moved" to do so, took up the reading of the Law, and the exposition of the mysteries connected with the Tetragrammaton, or four-lettered mystery-name of the Creative Power, and the angelic worlds. The

Essenes, therefore, were evidently in contact with Chaldæan "kabalism" and the Zoroastrian tradition of the discipline of purity; logic and metaphysics, however, were eschewed as injurious to a devotional life.

There were four degrees in the community: (i.) novices; (ii.) approachers; (iii.) new full members, or associates; (iv.) old members, or elders.

(i.) After the first year the novice gave all his possessions to the common treasury, and received a copy of the regulations, a spade (for the purpose described in Moses' camp-regulations), and a white robe, the symbol of purity; but the novice was still excluded from the lustral rites and common meal.

(ii.) After two years more, the novice shared in the lustral rites, but was still excluded from the common meal.

(iii.) The associates were bound by the most solemn assurances, and in case of any delinquency could only be judged by the "assembly," consisting of one hundred members.

The Degrees of Holiness.

Essenism is said by some to have been an exaggerated form of Pharisaism; and it may be a matter of surprise to those whose only knowledge of the Pharisees is derived from canonical documents, to learn that the highest aim of this enlightened school of Judaism was to attain to such a state of holiness as to be able to perform miraculous cures and to prophesy. The "degrees of holiness" practised by the Pharisees are said to have been: (i.) the study of the Law and circumspection; (ii.) the noviciate, in which the apron was the symbol of purity; (iii.) external

purity, by means of lustrations or baptisms; (iv.) celibacy; (v.) inward purity, purity of thought; (vi.) a higher stage still, which is not further defined; (vii.) meekness and holiness; (viii.) dread of every sin; (ix.) the highest stage of holiness; (x.) the stage which enabled the adept to heal the sick and raise the dead.

We should, however, remember that the Healers absolutely refused to have anything to do with the blood-sacrifices of the Temple-worship, and refused to believe in the resurrection of the physical body, which the rest of the Pharisees held as a cardinal doctrine.

In this brief sketch it is of course impossible to point out the striking similarities between the discipline of the Essenes and that of the Therapeutæ of Egypt and of the Orphic and Pythagorean schools. Every subject referred to in these essays requires a volume or several volumes for its proper treatment; we can only set up a few finger-posts, and leave the reader to make his own investigations.

But before leaving this most interesting theme, it will be necessary to point to the identity between many of the Essene regulations and the Gospel teachings and traditions.

Points of Contact with Christianity.

Converts were required to sell their possessions and give to the poor, for the laying up of treasure was regarded as injurious to a spiritual life. Not only did the Essenes despise riches, but they lived a life of self-imposed poverty. Love of the brotherhood and of one's neighbour was the soul of Essene life, and the basis of all action; and this characteristic of

their discipline called forth universal admiration. The members lived together as in a family, had all things in common, and appointed a steward to manage the common bag. When travelling they would lodge with brethren whom they had never seen before, as though with the oldest and most intimate friends; and thus they took nothing with them when they went on a journey. All members were set on the same level, and the authority of one over another was forbidden; nevertheless mutual service was strictly enjoined. They were also great lovers of peace, and so refused to take arms or manufacture warlike weapons; moreover they proscribed slavery. Finally, the end of the Essenes was to be meek and lowly in spirit, to mortify all sinful lusts, to be pure in heart, to hate evil but reclaim the evildoer, and to be merciful to all men. Moreover, their yea was to be yea, and their nay, nay. They were devoted to the curing of the sick, the healing of both body and soul, and regarded the power to perform miraculous cures and cast out evil spirits as the highest stage of discipline. In brief, they strove to be so pure as to become temples of the Holy Spirit, and thus seers and prophets.

To these inner communities were attached outer circles of pupils living in the world, and found in all the main centres of the Diaspora.

Philo distinguishes the Essenes from the Therapeuts by saying that the former were devoted to the "practical" life, while the latter proceeded to the higher stage of the "contemplative" life, and devoted themselves to still higher problems of

religion and philosophy, and it is in this direction that we must look for the best in Gnosticism.

THE TENDENCIES OF GNOSTICISM.

The "Secularizing" of Christianity.

BUT here again accurate historical data are out of the question, and we have for the most part to deal with what the Germans call "*Tendenz*." Harnack speaks of the tendency, which by long convention is generally called Gnostic, as the "acute secularizing of Christianity." What then is the meaning of this phrase? Catholic dogma is said to be the outcome of the *gradual* hellenizing of general Christianity, that is to say, the modification of popular tradition by the philosophical and theological method. All evolution of popular beliefs takes time, and the results arrived at by the general mind only after centuries, are invariably anticipated by minds of greater instruction generations before. The Galileos of the world are invariably condemned by their contemporaries. The Gnostic mind rapidly arrived on the one hand at many conclusions which the Catholics gradually adopted only after generations of hesitation, and on the other at a number of conclusions which even to our present generation seem too premature. All theosophic students are, in matters of religion, centuries before their time, for the simple reason that they are endeavouring by every means in their power to shorten the time of normal evolution and reach the mystic goal, which at every moment of time is near at hand *within*, but

for the majority is far distant along the normal path of external evolution.

The phrase "acute secularizing of Christianity," then, represents the rapid theologizing and systematizing of Christianity; but I doubt whether this altogether accounts for the facts. The Gnosis was pre-Christian; the Christ illumined its tradition, and by His public teaching practically threw open to all what had previously been kept "secret from the creation of the world"—to speak more accurately, the intermediate grades of the Mysteries. The leaven worked, and in course of time much that had been previously kept for the "worthy" alone, was forced into publicity and made common property. It was forced out by the stress of circumstances, inaugurated by the propaganda of Paul, and intensified by subsequent hæresiological controversy. The Gnostics claimed that there were two lines of tradition—the public sayings, and the inner teachings which dealt with things that the people in the world could not understand. This side of their teaching they kept at first entirely to themselves, and only gradually put forth a small portion of it; the rest they kept in closest secrecy, as they knew it could not possibly be understood.

The Gnostics were, then, the first Christian theologists, and if it is a cause for reprehension that the real historical side of the new movement was obscured in order to suit the necessities of a religion which aspired to universality, then the Gnostics are the chief culprits.

Catholicism finally, by accepting the Old Testa-

ment Canon in its literal interpretation, adopted the beliefs of popular Judaism and the Yahweh-cult, but in the earlier years it had been inclined to seek for an allegorical interpretation. Gnosticism, on the contrary, whenever it did not entirely reject the Old Covenant documents, invariably adopted not only the allegorical method, but also a canon of criticism which minutely classified the "inspiration" and so sifted out most of the objectionable passages from the Jewish Canon.

Yahweh not "the Father" of Jesus.

Thus, in persuit of a universal ideal, the tribal God—or rather, the crude views of the uninstructed Jewish populace as to Yahweh—was, when not entirely rejected, placed in a very subordinate position. In brief, the Yahweh of the Elohīm was not the Father of Jesus; the Demiurgos, or creative power of the world, was not the Mystery God over all.

The Inner Teaching.

And just as this idea of the true God transcended the popular notions of deity, so did the true teaching of the Gnosis illumine the enigmatical sayings or parables. The ethical teachings, or "Words of the Lord," and the parables, required interpretation; the literal meaning was sufficient for the people, but for the truly spiritual minded there was an infinite vista of inner meaning which could be revealed to the eye of the true Gnostic. Thus the plain ethical teaching and the unintelligible dark sayings were for the uninstructed; but there was a further instruction, an esoteric or inner doctrine, which was imparted to the worthy alone. Many gospels and apocalypses were thus

compiled under the inspiration of the "Spirit," as it was claimed—all purporting to be the instruction vouchsafed by Jesus to His disciples after the "resurrection from the dead," which mystical phrase they mostly represented as meaning the new birth or Gnostic illumination, the coming to life of the soul from its previous dead state. But even these Gnostic treatises did not reveal the whole matter; true, they explained many things in terms of internal states and spiritual processes; but they still left much unexplained, and the final revelation was only communicated by word of mouth in the body, and by vision out of the body.

Various Classes of Souls.

Thus it was a custom with them to divide mankind into three classes: (*a*) the lowest, or "hylics," were those who were so entirely dead to spiritual things that they were as the *hylē*, or unperceptive matter of the world; (*b*) the intermediate class were called "phychics," for though believers in things spiritual, they were believers simply, and required miracles and signs to strengthen their faith; (*c*) whereas the "pneumatics," or spiritual, the highest class, were those capable of knowledge of spiritual matters, those who could receive the Gnosis.

It is somewhat the custom in our days in extreme circles to claim that all men are "equal." The modern theologian wisely qualifies this claim by the adverb "morally." Thus stated the idea is by no means a peculiarly Christian view—for the doctrine is common to all the great religions, seeing that it simply asserts the great principle of justice as one

of the manifestations of Diety. The Gnostic view, however, is far clearer, and more in accord with the facts of evolution; it admits the "morally equal," but it further asserts difference of degree, not only in body and soul, but also in spirit, in order to make the morality proportional, and so to carry out the inner meaning of the parable of the talents.

This classification obtained not only among men, but also among powers; and the prophets of the Old Testament as instruments of such powers were, as stated above, thus sorted out into an order of dignity.

The Person of Jesus.

The personality of Jesus, the prophet of the new tidings proved, however, a very difficult problem for the Gnostic doctors, and we can find examples of every shade of opinion among them—from the original Ebionite view that he was simply a good and holy man, to the very antipodes of belief; that he was not only a descent of the Logos of God—a familiar idea to Oriental antiquity—but in deed and in his person very God of very God, a necessity forced upon faith by the boastful spirit of an enthusiasm which sought to transcend the claims of every existing religion.

The person of Jesus was thus made to bear the burden of every possibility of the occult world and every hidden power of human nature. In their endeavours to reconcile the ideas of a suffering man and of a triumphant initiator and king of the universe (both sensible and intellectual), they had recourse to the expedient of Docetism, a theory which could cover every phase of contradiction in the sharp juxtaposition of the divine and human natures of their ideal. The

docetic theory is the theory of "appearance." A sharp distinction was made between Christ, the divine æon or perfected "man," and Jesus the personality. The God, or rather God, in Christ, did not suffer, but appeared to suffer; the lower man, Jesus, alone suffered. Or again, Christ was not really incarnated in a man Jesus, but took to himself a phantasmal body called Jesus. But these were subsequent doctrinal developments on the ground of certain inner facts: (*a*) that a phantasmal body can be used by the "perfect," be made to appear and disappear at will, and become dense or materialised, so as to be felt physically; and (*b*) that the physical body of another, usually a pupil, can be used by a master of wisdom as a medium for instruction. Such underlying ideas occur in Gnostic treatises and form an important part of their christology, especially with regard to the period of instruction after the "resurrection."

The Main Doctrines.

In fact no problem appeared too lofty for the intuition of the Gnostic philosopher; the whence, whither, why, and how of things, were searched into with amazing daring. Not only was their cosmogony of the most sublime and complex character, but the limits of the sensible world were too narrow to contain it, so that they sought for its origins in the intellectual and spiritual regions of the immanent mind of deity, wherein they postulated a transcendent æonology which pourtrayed the energizings of the divine ideation. Equally complex was their anthropogony, and equally sublime the potentialities which they postulated of the human soul and spirit.

As to their soteriology, or theory of the salvation or regeneration of mankind, they did not confine the idea to the crude and limited notion of a physical passion by a single individual, but expanded it into a stupendous cosmical process, wrought by the volition of the Logos in His own nature.

Their eschatology, or doctrine of the "last things," again painted for mankind at the end of the world-cycle a future which gave "*nirvāna*" to the "spiritual" and æonian bliss to the "psychic," while the "hylic" remained in the obscuration of matter until the end of the "Great Peace"—a picture somewhat different from the crude expectation of the good feasting time on earth of the "Poor Men," which Harnack technically refers to as a "sensuous eudæmonistic eschatology."

Finally, the whole of their doctrine revolved round the conception of cyclic law for both the universal and the individual soul. Thus we find the Gnostics invariably teaching the doctrine not only of the preëxistence but also of the rebirth of human souls; and though a chief feature of their dogmas was the main doctrine of forgiveness of sins, they nevertheless held rigidly to the infallible working out of the great law of cause and effect. It is somewhat curious that these two main doctrines, which explain so much in Gnosticism and throw light on so many dark places, have been either entirely overlooked or, when not unintelligently slurred over, despatched with a few hurried remarks in which the critic is more at pains to apologize for touching on such ridiculous superstitions as "metempsychosis" and "fate," than to elucidate tenets which are a key to the whole position.

THE LITERATURE AND SOURCES OF GNOSTICISM.

THE study of Gnosticism has so far been almost entirely confined to specialists, whose works cannot be understanded of the people; the ordinary reader is deterred by the wealth of detail, by the difficulty of the technical terms, by the obscurity of theological phraseology, and by the feeling that he is expected to know many things of which he has never even heard. It is to be hoped that ere long some competent English scholar, endowed with the genius of lucid generalization, may be induced to write a popular sketch of the subject, in order that thinking men and women who have not enjoyed the advantages of a technical training in Church history and dogmatics, may understand its importance and absorbing interest.

Meantime our present essay may, perhaps, to some extent serve as a "guide to the perplexed," yet not conceived on the plan or carried out with the ability of a Maimonides, but rather the mere jotting down of a few notes and indications which may spare the general reader the years of labour the writer has spent in searching through many books.

Literature.

First, then, as to books; what are the best works on Gnosticism? The best books without exception are by German scholars. Here, then, we are confronted with our first difficulty, for the general reader as a rule is a man of one language only. For the ordinary English reader, therefore, such works are closed books, and he must have recourse to

translations, if such exist. Unfortunately only two of such works are procurable in English dress.

The second volume of the translation (Bohn, new ed., 1890) of Neander's *Church History* (1825, etc.), deals with the Gnostics, but the great German theologian's work is now out of date.

The best general review of Gnosticism by the light of the most recent researches, is to be found in Harnack's admirable *History of Dogma*, in the first volume, translated in 1894.

For a more detailed account, Smith and Wace's *Dictionary of Christian Biography* (1877-1887) is absolutely indispensable. The scheme of this useful work contains a general article, with lengthy articles on every Gnostic teacher, and shorter articles on a number of the technical terms of the Gnosis. Lipsius, Salmon, and Hort are responsible for the work, and their names are a sufficient guarantee of thoroughness.

The last two works are all that are necessary for a preliminary grasp of the subject, and are the outcome of profound scholarship and admirable critical acumen. It is a pleasure to subscribe one's tribute of praise to such work, although the point of view assumed by these distinguished scholars is not sufficiently liberal for one who is deeply convinced that the inspiration of every honest effort to formulate the inner truth of things is *really* from above.

Of other English works we may mention King's *Gnostics and their Remains* (2nd ed., 1887), a work intended for the general reader. King strongly

insists on a distinct Indian influence in Gnosticism, and deals with a number of interesting points; but his work lacks the thoroughness of the specialist. He is, however, far removed from "orthodoxy," and has an exceeding great sympathy for the Gnostics. The weakest point of King's work is the side he has brought into chief prominence; the so-called "remains" of the Gnostics, amulets, talismans, etc., in which King as a numismatologist took special interest, are now stated by the best authorities to have had most probably no connection with our philosophers. Nevertheless King's book is well worth reading.

Mansel's posthumous work, *The Gnostic Heresies of the First and Second Centuries* (1875), is not only unsympathetic, but for the most part does grave injustice to the Gnostics, by insisting on treating their leading ideas as a metaphysic to be judged by the standard of modern German philosophical methods, the Dean having himself once held a chair of philosophy.

Norton, in his *Evidences of the Genuineness of the Gospels* (1847), devotes his second volume to the Gnostics, but the value of his work is small.

Burton's *Inquiry into the Heresies of the Apostolic Age* (1829) might have been written by an early Church Father. The Bampton lecturer's effort and Norton's are now both out of date; moreover their books and that of Mansel are only procurable in the second-hand market.

So much for works in English dealing directly with Gnosticism.

The student will find in Harnack brief but discriminating bibliographies after each chapter, in which all the best works are given, especially those of German scholars; in Smith and Wace's Dictionary each article is also followed by a fair bibliography. A short general bibliography, and also a list of nearly all the latest work done on the only direct documents of Gnosticism which we possess, is to be found in the Introduction to my translation of the Gnostic treatise *Pistis Sophia* (1896); and a classified bibliography of all the most important works is appended to this essay. The student will be surprised to see how unfavourably the paucity of information in English compares with the mass of encyclopædic work in German, and how France also in this department of Church history and theological research runs England very close. But the consideration of these works does not fall into the plan of this short essay.

Indirect Sources.

So much, then, for the general literature of the subject in English; we have now to consider briefly the indirect and direct documents of Gnosticism. By "indirect" documents I mean the polemical writings of the Fathers of what subsequently established itself as the orthodox Catholic Church. These indirect documents were practically the only sources of information until 1853, when Schwartze's translation of the *Pistis Sophia* was published. By "direct" documents I mean the few Gnostic treatises which have reached our hands through the medium of Coptic translation.

Our indirect sources of information, therefore,

come through the hands of the most violent opponents of the Gnosis; and we have only to remember the intense bitterness of religious controversy at all times, and especially in the early centuries of the Church, to make us profoundly sceptical of the reliability of such sources of information. Moreover, the earlier and more contemporaneous, and therefore comparatively more reliable, sources are to be found mostly in the writings of the Fathers of the Western Church, who were less capable of understanding the philosophical and mystical problems which agitated the Eastern communities. The Roman and occidental mind could never really grasp Greek and oriental thought, and the Western Fathers were always the main champions of "orthodoxy."

We should further remember that we have extant no contemporary "refutation" of the first century (if any ever existed), or of the first three quarters of the second. The great "store-house of Gnosticism" is the Refutation of Irenæus, who wrote at Lyons in Gaul, far away from the real scene of action, in about the penultimate decade of the second century. All subsequent refutators base themselves more or less on the treatise of Irenæus, and frequently copy tho work of the Gallic bishop. If, then, Irenæus can be shown to be unreliable, the whole edifice of refutation is endangered by the insecurity of its foundation. This important point will be considered later on.

Prior to Irenæus a certain Agrippa Castor, who flourished late in the reign of Hadrian, about 135 A.D.,

is said by Eusebius to have been the first to write against heresies. His work is unfortunately lost.

Justin Martyr, the apologist, also composed a work against heresies; this Syntagma or Compendium is also unfortunately lost. Judging from Justin's account of the Gospel-story in his extant works, it would appear that the "Memoirs of the Apostles" to which he repeatedly refers, were not identical with our four canonical Gospels, though it may well be that these Gospels were assuming their present shape at this period. It may therefore be supposed that his work upon heresies threw too strong a light on pre-canonical controversy to make its continued use desirable. This may also be the reason of the disappearance of the work of Agrippa Castor. Justin flourished about 140-160 A.D.

Clement of Alexandria, whose greatest literary activity was from about 190-203 A.D., lived in the greatest centre of Gnostic activity, and was personally acquainted with some of the great doctors of the Gnosis. His works are for the most part free from those wholesale accusations of immorality with which the general run of Church Fathers in after years loved to bespatter the character of the Gnostics of the first two centuries. All the critics are now agreed that these accusations were unfounded calumnies as far as the great schools and their teachers were concerned, seeing that the majority were rigid ascetics. But this point will come out more clearly later on.

Clement is supposed to have dealt with the higher problems of Gnosticism in his lost work, *The Outlines*,

in which he endeavoured to construct a complete system of Christian teaching, the first three books of which bore a strong resemblance to the three stages of the Platonists: (i.) Purification, (ii.) Initiation, (iii.) Direct Vision. This work is also unfortunately lost. It was the continuation of his famous *Miscellanies*, in which the Christian philosopher laboured to show that he was a true Gnostic himself.

Tertullian of Carthage (fl. 200-220 A.D.), whose intolerance, "fiery zeal," and violently abusive language are notorious, wrote against heresies, mostly copying Irenæus. For the Marcionites, however, he is an independent authority. Part of the treatise against heresies ascribed to Tertullian is written by some unknown refutator, and so we have a Pseudo-Tertullian to take into consideration.

Hippolytus, Bishop of Portus at the mouth of the Tiber, was the disciple of Irenæus. He wrote a Compendium against all heresies, based almost entirely on Irenæus, which is lost; but a much larger work of the same Father was in 1842 discovered at Mount Athos. This purported to be a *Refutation of All Heresies*, and adds considerably to our information from indirect sources; for the work is not a mere copy of Irenæus, but adds a large mass of new matter, with quotations from some Gnostic MSS. which had fallen into Hippolytus' hands. The composition of this work may be dated somewhere about 222 A.D.

About this time also (225-250) Origen, the great Alexandrian Father, wrote a refutation against a

certain Celsus, who is supposed to have been the first opponent of Christianity among the philosophers, and who lived some seventy-five years before Origen's time. In this there are passages referring to some of the Gnostics. If then we include Origen's work against *The True Word* of Celsus, we have mentioned all the Fathers who are of any real value for the indirect sources of Gnosticism in the first two centuries

Philaster, bishop of Brescia in Italy, Epiphanius, bishop of Salamis in Cyprus, and Jerome, fall about the last quarter of the fourth century, and are therefore (unless, of course, they quote from earlier writers) too late for accuracy with regard to the things of the first two centuries. Philaster, moreover, is generally put out of court owing to his over-weening credulity; and the reliability of Epiphanius is often open to grave suspicion, owing to his great faculty of inventing or retailing scandals and all kinds of foulness.

Eusebius is fifty years earlier, but there is little to be gleaned from him on the subject, and his reputation for accuracy has been called into question by many independent historical critics.

Theodoret's Compendium, based on his predecessors and dating about the middle of the fifth century, is far too late to add to our knowledge of the first two centuries.

The study of these indirect documents has exercised the ingenuity of the critics and resulted in a marvellously clever feat of scholarship. Lipsius has demonstrated that Epiphanius, Philaster, and

Pseudo-Tertullian all draw from a common source, which was the lost Syntagma or Compendium of Hippolytus, consisting mainly of notes of the lectures of Irenæus; that is to say, in all probability, of the polemical tractates which the bishop read to his community, and on which he based his larger work. Thus reconstructing the lost document, he compares it with Irenæus, and infers for both a common authority, probably the lost Syntagma of Justin.

We thus see that our main source is Irenæus. The *Refutation* of Irenæus is the "store-house of Gnosticism"—according to the Fathers—for the first two centuries. Irenæus lived far away in the wilds of Gaul; is his evidence reliable? Setting aside the general presumption that no ecclesiastical writer at such a time could, in the nature of things, have been fair to the views of his opponents, which he perforce regarded as the direct product of the prince of all iniquity, we shall shortly see that fate has at length—only a few years ago—placed the final proof of this presumption in our hands.

Direct Sources.

But meantime let us turn our attention to our direct sources of imformation. We have now no less than three Codices containing Coptic translations of original Greek Gnostic works.

(i.) The Askew Codex, vellum, British Museum, London: containing the *Pistis Sophia* treatise and extracts from *The Books of the Saviour*.

(ii.) The Bruce Codex (consisting of two distinct MSS.), papyrus, Bodleian Library, Oxford: containing a series of lengthy fragments under the general

title *The Book of the Great Logos according to the Mystery;* another treatise of great sublimity but without a title; and a fragment or fragments of yet another treatise.

(iii.) The Akhmīm Codex, papyrus, Egyptian Museum, Berlin: containing *The Gospel of Mary* (or *Apocryphon of John*), *The Wisdom of Jesus Christ*, and *The Acts of Peter*.

The Akhmīm Codex was only discovered in 1896. Prior to 1853, when the Askew Codex was translated into Latin, nothing of a practical nature was known of its contents, while the contents of the Bruce Codex were not known till 1891-1892, when translations appeared in French and German. We have to reflect on the indifference which allowed these important documents to remain, in the one case (Cod. Ask.) for eighty years without translation, and in the other (Cod. Bruc.) one hundred and twenty years! The first attempt at translation in English appeared only in 1896 in my version of *Pistis Sophia*.

It will thus be seen that the study of Gnosticism from direct sources is quite recent, and that all but the most recent research is out of date. This new view is all the more forced upon us by the latest discovery which in the Akhmīm MS. places in our hands the means of testing the accuracy of Irenæus, the sheet-anchor of hæresiologists. *The Gospel of Mary* is one of the original sources that Irenæus used. We are now enabled in one case to control the Church Father point by point—and find that he has so condensed and paraphrased his original that the consistent system of the school of Gnosticism which

he is endeavouring to refute, appears as an incomprehensible jumble.

This recent activity among specialists in Gnostic research, at a time when a widespread interest in a revival of theosophic studies has prepared the way for a reconsideration of Gnosticism from a totally different standpoint to that of pure criticism or refutation, is a curious coincidence.

From the above considerations it is evident that so far are the Gnostics and their ideas from being buried in that oblivion which their opponents have so fervently desired and so busily striven to ensure, that now at the opening of the twentieth century, at a time when Biblical criticism is working with the reincarnated energy and independence of a Marcion, the memory of these universalizers of Christianity is coming once more to the front and occupying the attention of earnest students of religion.

In addition to these indirect and direct sources there is also another source that may yield us some valuable information, when submitted to the searching of an enlightened criticism. The legends and traditions preserved in the Gnostic *Acts* deserve closer attention than they have hitherto received, as we shall hope to show in the sequel by quotations from several of them.